

Testimony of Billie P. Weiss, MPH, Executive Director  
Violence Prevention Coalition of Greater Los Angeles  
State of California Little Hoover Commission  
Hearing on Youth Crime and Violence Prevention

Overview of the Violence Prevention Coalition, Established 1991

A. Understanding the epidemic: Public Health Approach

1. Data
  - a. Homicides – Leading cause of death for population 15-24 years of age
  - b. Assaults
  - c. Crime Statistics
  - d. Populations at risk
  - e. Methods and causes of injury – firearms leading mechanism for population less than 35 years of age
2. Haddon Matrix
3. Spectrum of Prevention

B. Identifying Prevention and Intervention Activities

1. Governmental programs including Law Enforcement Intervention
2. Community Based Organization
3. Categorical Intervention and Prevention Programs
4. Identifying gaps
5. Need for collaboration
6. Funding Resources

C. Strategies to develop a coalition

1. Membership
2. Mission statement
3. Structure
4. Goals and Objectives
5. Funding and other support

D. Activities

1. Education – Conferences
2. Data Collection – Fact Sheets
3. Increasing Public Awareness – Campaigns
4. Policy Education – Existing Policy
5. Policy Changes – Using Data, Community Support
6. Research and Evaluation – Establishing comprehensive databases
7. Global Evaluation – What Works
8. Community Commitment – Youth Involvement

## E. Accomplishments

### 1. County-wide Coalition

- a. Membership – more than 720 members from public and private sector
- b. Policy Changes – change in requirements for gun dealers, safety requirements, local, state and national policy
- c. Measuring the Changes in rates of Violence
- d. Establishment of local programs – 15 neighborhood coalitions
- e. Acceptance of the Public Health Approach – law enforcement now using the approach
- f. Youth Voices – youth forums, youth involved in planning and strategy development
- g. Community Resource Directory
- h. Technical Assistance/Training
- i. Recognition and Awards – Safe Cities Partnership (National Partnership for Re-inventing Government), law enforcement, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, National Conference of Mayors, State Assembly, UCLA School of Public Health
- j. Challenge Grants to Community-based Organizations for Youth Violence Prevention Activities
- k. Bringing Research and Community Practitioners Together

## F. Lessons Learned

1. **Funding for prevention** is almost non-existent. Education of funders and policy makers on the need to build prevention infrastructure is critical. Collaboration and coalition building is crucial for violence prevention to be successful and yet funding continues to focus on direct services.

RAND and others have shown that prevention works. Prevention costs less than incarceration or probation or intervention activities after youth have become involved in violent or criminal behaviors. Yet, it is becoming increasingly difficult to fund prevention activities, such as, parenting for violence prevention, school and pre-school anger management, conflict resolution, arts, and recreational activities.

2. **Coordination of prevention activities.** There is no single statewide violence prevention coordination, while “Shifting” focuses on getting the Departments on the same page and coordinating their efforts. To date, there has been no attempt to focus on community prevention activities.
3. **Evaluation** is lacking. Program funding is often based on politics rather than “best practices.” There has been little attempt to fund rigorous program evaluation. Evaluations that are done, or required by funders, are generally focused on process (widget counting) rather than outcomes.
4. There has been no attempt to conduct **global evaluation** of the decrease in homicide and violence that has occurred in major cities. For example: there was a decrease in homicides and gun deaths of more than 30% in Los

Angeles County from 1994 to 1999. Similar decreases occurred in Boston, New York, Miami, etc. The law enforcement approaches in each of these cities was different, yet there has been no attempt to try to understand what causes these decreases. In Los Angeles, different communities have experienced differing rates of decrease, and some communities have decreased more than others have. The VPC Research and Evaluation Committee has developed a protocol in an attempt to conduct a global evaluation. This model takes into account the economic changes in a community, including employment, the number and types of social services, prevention and intervention activities and population served, law enforcement programs diversion, etc. This is expensive, yet vital to understand what works. In Los Angeles, as in California, shifting demographics forecast a large increase in young males 15-24 years of age in the next ten years. If we do not understand what worked, we may be powerless to prevent an increased wave of youth violence.

5. Homicides, assaults, violent crime are all down now, but indications in Los Angeles demonstrate that we may be on the precipice of an upswing in the epidemic once again. Gang warfare on the streets of Los Angeles has increased in several neighborhoods. These are precisely the neighborhoods with the fewest prevention programs. The major lesson from these developments is that we cannot become complacent.